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BODMER AND MILTON

In one of his essays Hamann says: "Die meisten Bücher sind . . . ein treuer Abdruck der Fähigkeiten und Neigungen, mit denen man gelesen hat und lesen kann." Of no one's writings, perhaps, is this more conspicuously true than of certain works of Bodmer. Throughout his life he was a wide reader, and much of his reading is reflected in his writings. The present discussion will attempt to deal, merely in a general way, with his relation to Milton, a more detailed treatment of the subject being reserved for some future time.

At the outset it may be stated categorically that if there had been no *Paradise Lost*, there could have been no Bodmerian epic *Noah*.¹ We may go still further and assert: without a Milton a Bodmer would have been impossible. Bodmer not only read, translated, studied, and discussed *Paradise Lost*, but was also an ardent admirer of its author. More than that, on the Continent he became in the course of time a veritable apostle of the English poet. The evidence of this profound and unflinching appreciation is strewn in abundance through his theoretical and critical writings as well as through his correspondence. Among the works which evince his deep interest in Milton may be mentioned his *Kritische Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie* (1740), his *Kritische Betrachtungen über die poetischen Gemälde* (1741) and the *Sammlung kritischer, poetischer und anderer geistvollen Schriften* (1741-2); appreciatory remarks are also contained in the preface to his translation of *Paradise Lost*.

In the spring of 1720 Bodmer, with his friends Breitinger and Johann Meister, founded the literary club *Gesellschaft der Maler*. The first number of the club's weekly literary organ, *Die Diskurse der Malern*, was published May 3rd, 1721. The little journal, avowedly an imitation of the English moral weeklies of Steele and Addison, was doomed to be shortlived; its publication ceased within two years. But the very year which witnessed its passing saw the

¹At the suggestion of Prof. J. A. Walz of Harvard University, the writer several years ago undertook a somewhat detailed study of Bodmer's *Noah*. In the memorial volume *Johann Jakob Bodmer, Denkschrift zum CC. Geburtstag*, Zürich 1900, the same epic is pointed out as a promising subject for investigation.

beginning of another important literary enterprise on the part of Bodmer, for it was in 1723 that he received from his friend Zellweger a copy of the Tonson duodecimo edition of *Paradise Lost*—then “the only copy between the upper Rhine and the Reuss”²—which he proceeded to read with the help of merely a Latin-English dictionary,³ and so fascinated was he by Milton’s poetic genius that he forthwith planned a German translation of his biblical epic.

Burying himself in the rural solitude of his Swiss home, he appears to have completed his task by the following year.⁴ His translation is in prose.⁵ For over seven years it failed of publication, thanks, in part at least, to clerical objection, for by some of his contemporaries the poem was regarded as an all-too “romantic” treatment of so sacred a theme; not until 1732 did it appear in print. At this work Bodmer filed away with a rare assiduity so that, in the course of fifty years, no fewer than four revised editions of his translation came from the press. This prolonged and, to us, almost incredible revisional labor was strikingly paralleled by the indefatigable industry of Bodmer’s contemporary Klopstock, who likewise for a period of approximately half a century as conscientiously polished away at his *Messias*.

Despite its many shortcomings we may say that in his prose version of *Paradise Lost* Bodmer acquitted himself in a manner

² Cf. G. Jenny: *Miltons Verlorne Paradies in der deutschen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1890. On page 19 he cites passages from Füssli as they are contained in the *Neues schweizerisches Museum* 1. Jahrgang 1794, page 803.

³ Cf. *Bodmers persönliche Anckdoten* (ed. by Theodor Vetter) page 36.

⁴ In his brief survey “The Relation of English to German Literature in the Eighteenth Century” in *Poet Lore* 1890, vol. II, O. Seidensticker erroneously states that Bodmer “translated the *Paradise Lost* in 1732;” the same error is made by Carl Lemcke in his *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung neuerer Zeit* vol. I, page 409. On page 60 of his monograph *Edward Young in Germany* J. L. Kind makes the statement that Bodmer became acquainted with a French translation of *Paradise Lost* in 1719 and prepared his German version from that. On Bodmer’s own testimony in his *Anklagung des verderbten Geschmacks* (1728) no French translation was accessible to him in 1719; cf. on this point Hans Bodmer: *Die Anfänge des zürcherischen Milton*, page 183, in *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte* (1893) dedicated to Michael Bernays. The first French translation, we may add, appears to have been that of 1727. It was probably a further oversight on the part of Dr. Kind when he gave 1762 as the date of Berge’s translation of *Paradise Lost*; that appeared eighty years earlier viz., in 1682.

⁵ It is interesting to note that just as Bodmer’s version of *Paradise Lost* is in prose, so is Collyer’s English translation of Bodmer’s *Noah*, London, 1767.

which was not really discreditable for his time, though, as must be admitted, it falls far short of meeting the considerably higher standards of to-day. Needless to state, it was prior to the greatest heat of the literary feud, which Gottsched and his Saxon coterie waged with the Swiss group, that the Saxon leader pronounced Bodmer's translation superior, in some respects, to the original. This dictum is interesting in itself; it happens, however, to recall the recorded judgment of Prof. Klotz to the effect that Ebert's German version of Young's *Night Thoughts* was also superior to its original.⁶

Through the medium of Bodmer's translation the theme and the method of *Paradise Lost* made its first and, at the same time, very profound and lasting impression upon the young Klopstock. This is a fact of some literary importance, since Klopstock had not yet acquired the ability to read Milton's masterpiece in the original. Evidence of this as well as of other forms of helpfulness on the part of Bodmer is contained in the following passage which is cited from Klopstock's first letter to him, written under date of August 10th 1748:⁷ ". . . ich [muss] Ihnen sagen, dass ich Sie nicht nur verehere, sondern dass ich Sie liebe, und dass Sie, so wenig Sie es selbst wissen mögen, die grössten Verdienste um mich haben. Ich war ein junger Mensch, der seinen Homer und Virgil las, und sich über die kritischen Schriften der Sachsen im Stillen ärgerte, als mir Ihre und Breitingers kritische Schriften in die Hände kamen. Ich las sie nicht nur, sondern ich verschlang sie vielmehr; und wenn mir zur Rechten Homer und Virgil lag, so hatte ich jene zur Linken, um sie immer nachschlagen zu können. Und als Milton, den ich vielleicht ohne Ihre Übersetzung allzuspät zu sehen bekommen hätte, mir in die Hände fiel, fachte er im innersten Grunde das Feuer an, das Homer in mir entzündet hatte, und hob meine Seele, um den Himmel und die Religion zu besingen." Surely, in view of Klopstock's indebtedness to Milton, a tribute of importance. Thus we see that Milton became, in a sense, the

⁶ This was the same Klotz to whom Lessing a few years later paid his respects in the *Briefe antiquarischen Inhalts*. In a letter to Nicolai dated Nov. 21, 1768 Herder refers to him disparagingly as "ein zweiter Gottsched."

⁷ The German version of the letter is given by Mörikofer in his *Klopstock in Zürich*, page 8 ff.; Mörikofer there points out that the original Latin text of the letter is contained in *Isis*, 1805, vol. I, page 355 ff., a periodical which was not accessible to the present writer.

ideal both of Bodmer and Klopstock, as Molière a little later claimed the admiration of the young Lessing. Bodmer as well as Klopstock rated Milton above Homer; this is due, in part at least, to the fact that both at this time favored religious themes in poetry and regarded moral beauty as one of the chief ends to be furthered by a poetic treatment of virtue and loftiness of sentiment. In other words, not pure, but applied, poetry was their motto. This was also the attitude of Gottsched and, we may add, of Bodmer's friends Sulzer and Breitinger; in fact, it was a view which was then more or less in the air.

Even before the first cantos of Klopstock's *Messias* were published, Bodmer had an opportunity to read certain portions in manuscript, as they were furnished him by his friends Gärtner and Hagedorn. This was in May 1747, and so deeply was he impressed that in the enthusiasm of the moment he declared the very spirit of Milton himself had descended upon the young poet. It seems by no means strange that, after having distinguished himself as a discoverer of Milton, he should have been destined to become also one of the discoverers and earnest champions of the Miltonizing Klopstock. In keeping with his gift for friendship and helpfulness, he accordingly offered Klopstock the hospitality of his quiet Swiss home so that he might, at perfect leisure, devote himself to the furtherance of his religious epic. Though the invitation was accepted, the visit proved less successful than either author had expected. While he regarded himself as Klopstock's mentor and protector, we may be sure that in his heart Bodmer was, at the same time, ready to become in a manner his disciple, for he hoped that his gifted guest would assist him in the literary work which he had at that time upon his desk viz., the biblical epic *Noah*.

Several years prior to this time Bodmer had published a sketch of the poem⁸, hoping thereby to enlist the interest of some of the younger men of talent to the point of trying their hand at executing the plan. But now, under the inspiring effect of the opening cantos of the *Messias*, he himself—he had just passed his fiftieth

⁸ Cf. his *Grundriss eines epischen Gedichtes von dem geretteten Noah* in the *Sammlung kritischer, poetischer und anderer geistvollen Schriften*. Viertes Stück. Zürich 1741-2. Possibly Milton's several references to the Flood may have suggested to Bodmer the plan of writing his *Noah*.

year—felt moved to gird up his loins for the ambitious task of writing an epic poem on the theme of the rescued Noah.⁹

We have seen that Bodmer had previously prepared a German version of Milton's masterpiece. Even if no further evidence were available, we should be justified in assuming *a priori* that so interested and so intimate an acquaintance with a work of the length and the distinction of *Paradise Lost* must needs have left its unmistakable influence upon his own biblical epic. And so, in fact, it did. Making due allowance for the personality of authors, the psychology of literary production is frequently to be regarded as more or less the result of suggestion, guidance, and inspiration derived from existing literary works; indeed, at times it is a direct and conscious imitation of models. We know that even so rare an imagination as Milton's had to be set in motion by books. Pursuing this subject a little further we may say that in some cases the influence of one author upon another may be slight, so slight, in fact, as to be a matter of sheer conjecture. Again, in others the influence, though positive enough, may be sporadic. And yet a third type may reveal a perfectly obvious influence upon almost every page. Bodmer clearly belongs to the last group.¹⁰

The *Noah* appeared in instalments in 1750-1752. In the original sketch of the epic the author refers to a number of scenes and situations in *Paradise Lost* which might be used to advantage. However, if we were to depend exclusively upon such scattered evidence we should have a most inadequate, not to say erroneous, conception of Bodmer's actual indebtedness to Milton. That their themes overlap at certain points might in itself suffice to explain certain general correspondences; it will by no means account for the astounding number both of formal and material parallels which the writer has gleaned and which he hopes some time to publish *in extenso*, together with a considerable body of evidence showing also the influence of many other authors upon Bodmer. By no means all the correspondences between the *Noah* and *Paradise Lost* are of equal obviousness; rather, the resemblances vary from the most definite, palpable sort to a mere subtle agreement

⁹ By a singular coincidence Milton produced his *Paradise Lost* at about the same age, being in his fifty-second year when he began his epic.

¹⁰ For an account which will tend to substantiate this statement cf. C. H. Ibershoff: *Dryden's Tempest as a Source of Bodmer's Noah* in *Modern Philology*, August 1917, pp. 54-61.

in spirit which may be perfectly apparent at a careful reading though, at times, it may be more or less impracticable to point out the common features.

Bodmer, like Milton, took his theme from the "best known book". This fact at once accounts for some of the resemblances, in particular for the common biblical incidents and, in a measure, for the general Old Testament spirit which pervades both epics. At the same time we have here also the key to some of the notable differences between the two poems, for not only did Bodmer and Milton choose for their central epic plan themes which are unlike, but frequently they differed also in their choice of minor matters. And even where the bible was drawn upon for common matter of character or incident, we sometimes find a marked variation of treatment by the two authors.

The theme of Milton's poem is the fall of Man through the sin of Eve. Bodmer's epic, as the title indicates, deals with the story of the Flood and the final rescue of Noah. Both epics are written in a serious religious spirit¹¹, and in both there is discernible a certain anti-Catholic sentiment. Each poem reflects its author's virtue and piety, and each, moreover, ends in a note of reconciliation and hopefulness. As a minor matter we may note here that Bodmer like Milton, does not disdain to relieve the moral earnestness of his epic by introducing, at one or two points, just a touch of humor. In the Bodmerian as well as in the Miltonian epic we find a marked predilection for the marvelous; though, on the other hand, a love of nature and of idyllic simplicity is likewise reflected in both. That Bodmer's soul did indeed respond to the sounds as well as the silentness of nature is attested by such a passage as the following:

"Die Stunden
Fliegen mit sanftem Weben vor ihnen, wie Zephire fliegen,
Stille wie der Wandel des Mondes; Gewühl war ihnen nicht nötig,
Um ihr Dasein zu fühlen. Noch schallten Stimmen vom Haine,
Stimmen von rieselnden Quellen."¹²

The figure in the following lines bespeaks the same sense for nature:

¹¹ In this connection we may recall Voltaire's observation: "La religion . . . est presque toujours le fondement de la poésie épique." Cf. his *Essai sur la poésie épique*.

¹² Cf. the *Noah* ed. of 1765, page 5.

"Sanft, wie zwischen den Ufern bekränzt mit Lilien, die Fluten
Silbern rinnen, so floss vor Jemima der Morgen zum Abend."¹³

Similar evidence of his loving interest in nature is scattered not only through the *Noah* but through other writings of his as well. But strong as is for him the appeal of nature's quiet charms, it is, after all, not equal to that of friendship as appears, for example, from the significant words which he puts into the mouth of one of his characters:

Zwar schön is der tauende Frühlingsmorgen,
Schön ist im Aufgang der Phosphor mit seinem leuchtenden Auge;
Und wie schön sind auch die Geländer mit Blumen gesticket,
Diese Früchte der Zweige mit ihrem wohlreichenden Schmelze;
Aber sind sie so schön wie die Freundschaft der Edelgeborenen?¹⁴

At another time—nor does it surprise us—Bodmer glorifies "herzerquickende Freundschaft" even to the point of classing it with the virtues "die Geist zum göttlichen Ursprunge nähern."¹⁵ To him friendship was a particularly congenial theme, as is evidenced by his frequent reference to it in the *Noah*;¹⁶ in *Paradise Lost*, on the other hand, it yields in relative importance to the subject of divine and human love. This difference is natural enough in view of the fact that a capacity for friendship was one of the outstanding traits of Bodmer's nature, whereas love as a personal factor entered more abundantly into Milton's life. It must be added, however, that with his unmistakable gift for friendship Bodmer combined a pronounced liking for the unruffled quiet and peacefulness of an almost hermit-like seclusion, such a fondness as speaks to us from the following characteristic passage:

Und wisst ihr was Schöners,
Als die ruhige Hoheit des stillen verborgenen Lebens,
Wo der Friede mit seinem beständig grünenden Ölzweig
Eingang und Ausgang krönt?¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid.* page 104.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 94. The phrase "die Geländer mit Blumen gesticket" recalls Milton's

"the violet,

Crocus and hyacinth . . .

Broidered the ground." (P. L. IV 700 ff.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, page 20.

¹⁶ Friendship was also a favorite subject of the poet Young, who represents another of Bodmer's sources. For the "Bremer Beiträger" friendship was even a kind of cult, as it was for the members of the "Hainbund," the literary coterie which centred about Klopstock.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, page 94 f.

Milton's theological interests frequently show through his *Paradise Lost*; from the pages of the *Noah*, however, one easily gathers that Bodmer's concerns, aside from literature, lie more particularly in the realm of history. The didactic element, though present in both epics, comes more to the fore in Bodmer's poem than in Milton's; moreover, Bodmer in his more pronounced moralizing tendency betrays at the same time a stronger leaning toward sentimentalism, thereby identifying himself at once as a true child of his century. Both authors make a very general use of the device of dialogue for presenting their stories, and both are wont to weave lesser episodes and incidents into a larger whole.

Though perhaps not to the same extent as Milton, nevertheless Bodmer too, in his *Noah*, is given to displaying his learning; and like Milton he has been criticized therefor.¹⁸ In a letter to Gleim under date of March 17th, 1751, Ramler writes with reference to a journal to be founded: "Wir wollen mehr als Rezensionen hinein-tun. Was mir jetzt einfällt. . . . Abhandlung von der Gelehrsamkeit in Gedichten (N. B. dieses ist heimlich wider die letzten Gesänge des Noah)."¹⁹ It is interesting to note that in his translation of *Paradise Lost*²⁰ Bodmer devotes a lengthy footnote to the

¹⁸ Landor declares of Milton: ". . . he was too fond of showing what he had read." (Cf. the *Works*, London 1876, vol. 8 page 390). In the edition of Milton's *Poetical Works*, Oxford 1824, which is provided with "notes of various authors" we read concerning *Paradise Lost* XI 387 ff.: "And thus he [sc. Milton] surveys the four different parts of the world, but it must be confessed, more with an ostentation of learning, than with any additional beauty to the poem." And in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* the poet Young has this to say: "If Milton had spared some of his learning, his muse would have gained more glory than he would have lost by it." Such criticisms are, we must admit, far from undeserved, since of all great epics *Paradise Lost* is undoubtedly the most learned; indeed, it is Milton's deliberate display of learning which, unfortunately, makes the poem more or less unpalatable to many. If there is a measure of truth in the hyperbole that "*Paradise Lost* is a poem which everybody praises and nobody reads," it is the super-learned character of the work which is, no doubt, largely responsible.

¹⁹ Unless Ramler had an opportunity to see portions of the *Noah* before they were published, his expression "die letzten Gesänge" must have reference to the last cantos which had then appeared, as the complete epic was not published until 1752. The date of the letter appears to be correct; at any rate, it is so given by H. Pröhle in his *Friedrich der Grosse und die deutsche Literatur*, Berlin 1878, page 218, and also by Carl Schüddekopf in his *Briefwechsel zwischen Gleim und Ramler*, 1906 page 290.

²⁰ Cf. the edition of 1742 page 471 f.

question of Milton's ostentation of learning and on this score constitutes himself the poet's apologist. The note in question reads in part as follows: "Ein episches Gedicht ist nicht für die unwissenden und trägen Köpfe geschrieben. Das befreite Jerusalem und die Henrias selbst, erfordern, wenn sie mit einer völligen Zufriedenheit sollen gelesen werden, eine gewisse vorläufige Belesenheit, und hätten zum Trost vieler Leute einen guten Ausleger wohl nötig. Es kommt in diesem Stücke bei allen Gedichten von dieser Art nur auf das mindere, und das mehrere an. . . . Es fraget sich hauptsächlich, ob man, wenn man sich in den Stand gesetzt hat, gewisse feine Ausdrückungen, gewisse gelahrte Anzüge zu verstehen, aufrichtig und um sein selbst willen, wohl wünschte, dass das Vergnügen, so man daher empfängt, bei der zweiten Überlesung aus dem Gedichte, als etwas Überflüssiges und Unnötiges weggenommen werde?"

Like Milton, Bodmer sings the praise of liberty,²¹ righteousness, the simple life, the beauties of nature, and the glories of the life hereafter; like his English master he introduces angels and devils;²² like him he traverses the world and soars boldly through space his heavenly cosmography revealing more than one feature of the Miltonian scheme. Again conforming to its English prototype, the *Noah* is divided into twelve parts; however, in point of meter each epic is distinct, for instead of the iambic pentameter, Bodmer chose to cast his epic in the hexameter. After referring to his translation of Pope's *Dunciad*, he writes in a letter to Hagedorn dated September 10th, 1748: "Ich wollte den elfsilbigen Vers in keinem grossen oder ernsthaften Gedichte gebrauchen,²³ seitdem ich die Tüchtigkeit der Hexameter, die Kleist und Klopstock gebrauchen, erkannt habe."²⁴ Moreover, he had already tried his hand at the hexameter—the rhymed type, to be sure—in his *Charakter der deutschen Gedichte* and his *Drollingerische Muse*.

Throughout the twelve cantos of the *Noah* one is conscious that Bodmer was largely guided by the diction, the epic figures, the

²¹ On one single page of the *Noah*—page 301—we come upon no fewer than four references to "Freiheit." Bodmer's republicanism, it is to be noted, is another personal quality which he possessed in common with Milton.

²² His infernal spirits, however, betray also the influence of Klopstock's *Messias*.

²³ His translation of the *Dunciad* is in blank verse.

²⁴ Cf. Hagedorn's *Poetische Werke*, Hamburg 1825, Fünfter Teil, page 209.

scenes, the scenery, the episodes, the machinery of the marvelous, the poetic contrasts, and the religious spirit of *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, the imitation in these and still other respects is about as close and frequently, one may well say, as slavish, as was possible to his imitative ability and as was compatible, at the same time, with the difference of his general theme and with his further borrowings from other sources. In general one discerns a determined and sustained effort on his part to equal both the idyllic and the heroic features of Milton's epic. Even on the very last page of his *Noah* his indebtedness to *Paradise Lost* appears, for in the line:

Die Menschen
Stiegen von da hinunter, die Erd' in Besitzung zu nehmen."—

there is obviously a reminiscence of Milton's closing passage:

the hastening Angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain
The world was all before them.

In view of his extensive indebtedness to Milton the question naturally suggests itself: how did Bodmer manage to borrow such a mass of material from *Paradise Lost* as he actually worked into the fabric of his *Noah*. Did he make excerpts? Probably.²⁵ But whether he did or not, we may, at any rate, take it for granted that as his poem grew under his hands he made it a practice to get additional hints, both as to form and matter, by re-reading portions of Milton's epic whenever he felt the need. Nor should this method altogether surprise us when we recall that even so gifted a writer as Schiller, while at work, for example, upon his *Jungfrau von Orleans*, was wont to re-read such portions of Shakespeare as he thought might prove of inspirational value for his purpose; however, there is a marked difference to be noted in this connection, for, unlike Bodmer, Schiller possessed the ability to transmute what he borrowed. That, finally, Bodmer's memory contributed some of the parallels between Milton's epic and his own seems likely

²⁵ Elsewhere the writer hopes to revert to this question and on that occasion intends to cite a passage which he is inclined to regard as virtually Bodmer's veiled confession of such a practice. Further evidence, as will be shown, favors such an assumption, not only with regard to *Paradise Lost* but with reference to many other works as well. On this point, then, the writer takes issue with Hirzel, Cholevius, Baechtold and others.

enough. It is significant that, like Klopstock in his *Messias*, Bodmer assumes the reader's acquaintance with certain episodes of *Paradise Lost*.

Bodmer's unfailing admiration for Milton, it must be admitted, argues a taste for a poet of very high order and that at a time when Milton had not yet, on the Continent, come unto his own. Indeed, in a sense it was none other than Bodmer who discovered Milton for Germany. But that by virtue of his *Noah* he merits, in any legitimate acceptance, the title of continuator of Milton, no one to-day could for a moment seriously maintain. Sitting in judgment upon his epic, as we needs must, we are constrained to admit that, unlike the Miltonian masterpiece, it is not a distinguished performance. Not that the *Noah* is destitute of all merits.^{25a} There are occasional passages of at least moderate success such as, for example, certain of the idyllic scenes and then, above all, the picture of the Flood. But where Bodmer signally fails is in the portrayal of his epic characters; in fact, so lacking are they in poetic, convincing individuality that, on the whole, they fail to arouse our sympathy or even to interest us, for the author lacks, to a disappointing degree, the Miltonian wealth and force of plastic imagination. He lacks, moreover, his ease and poise, his majesty of movement, his pregnant utterance, his depth, his ruggedness and beauty of diction. In the *Noah* we miss those life-touches which at once charm and convince, for Bodmer is seriously deficient in aesthetic truth. He is essentially an Intellectual. His is the didactic temper of the critic and the scholar, and it is to his paucity both of poetic ideas and literary power that we must ascribe those stretches of his epic which are distinctly prosaic in spirit and in form. The *Noah* is wanting in refreshing spontaneity; we are conscious of the deliberateness of it all, and we are ever haunted by the conviction that its author is a literary artisan, not an inspired, creative artist. Though the epic gives abundant evidence of Bodmer's wide, assimilated reading, the garnered material is not vitalized—a failure due not only to his inadequate visualizing faculty, but also to the further fact that he does not command the insinuating charm of words which, as in *Paradise Lost*, so stimulates the reader's fancy that it "bodies

^{25a} The final word on the labored products of the inveterate poetaster was spoken by Herder in his respectful though essentially depreciative review of Bodmer's *Die Noachide*, published in *Herders Lebensbild* I, 3, 2, p. 147 ff.—Ed.

forth" its own images and visions. Too rarely does the reader of the *Noah* become in even a distant sense "a kind of spectator," as the Addisonian phrase has it.

Compared with *Paradise Lost* the *Noah* is marred at times by a disturbing harshness and angularity of verse, a defect which is probably to be accounted for, in a measure, by Bodmer's deficient musical sense. How different from Milton, whose splendidly harmonious numbers bespeak his sensitive musical ear. It is well known that he was not only endowed with a fine feeling for music but that on the organ he was a performer of no mean ability. Perhaps it will not be forcing the point to say that in Bodmer and Milton we have a twofold confirmation of the saying that music is indeed the mother of poetry. In a word, then, Bodmer lacks all of Milton's poetic distinction. Eager enough he was to attain to the apostolical succession, but his temperamental, shall we say constitutional, incapacity as a poet, together with the immaturity of the German language of his time and its inadequacy as an instrument for the type of heroic poetry which he had set himself to write, proved all too serious handicaps to permit him to realize his fondest dream.

Franz Muncker, in his standard life of Klopstock, makes the unqualified statement that Bodmer esteemed Klopstock "hoch über alle andern Dichter."²⁶ This pronouncement can hardly be allowed to pass unchallenged. Quite apart from the surprising extent of his borrowings from Milton, we happen to have it on Bodmer's own personal testimony that of all the works of the moderns he regarded *Paradise Lost* as the unequaled masterpiece, his judgment on this point being recorded in the following passage:²⁷ "Gleichwie es [viz. *Paradise Lost*] ein Meisterstück des poetischen Geistes ist, und kaum ein höherer Gipfel ist, auf welchen sich das Gemüte des Menschen erheben kann, so kann man aus den Wirkungen, die es tut, einigermassen abnehmen, auf welchen Grad der Geschmack am Vortrefflichen bei gewissen Personen, Klassen der Menschen, und ganzen Nationen gestiegen ist. Das Schicksal, welches das verlorne Paradies hier oder dort empfangen hat, ist das Schicksal, welches die Gaben des freiesten Geistes, die schönste Weisheit, und die würdigste Tugend allda empfangen. . . .

²⁶ Cf. his *Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock*, second edition 1900, page 165.

²⁷ Cf. Mörikofer: *Die schweizerische Literatur* page 90 f.; he quotes from the third edition of Bodmer's translation of *Paradise Lost*.

Wir sind überzeugt, wer wahren Geschmack und einiges Genie hat, wird dieses Gedicht für das beste unter den Werken der Neuern . . . erkennen." [Italics not Bodmer's] Certainly a fine tribute and one that does not fail to reflect high credit upon its author.

Despite his many obvious limitations as a producer of poetry, it must be conceded that Bodmer was an author of serious literary purpose—an author, withal, who, besides being a critic and a patron of literary interests and activities, was in the German literary world of his day and generation to all intents and purposes a pathfinder and a pioneer. Milton, on the other hand—lest that fact be forgotten—had the good fortune to fall heir to the finest of literary traditions and to a language which had, in a sense, attained its flowering. In view of such widely different literary conditions under which Milton and Bodmer lived, moved, and had their being, it is perfectly comprehensible how not only the author of the *Noah* but German writers generally, in the course of the eighteenth century, were pleased to sit at the feet of their English cousins; and thus it was that they became deeply indebted to English literature for inspiration, for matter, and for literary form, just as in the Middle Ages, and subsequently, certain German authors had gone to school to their French *confrères*.

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